

C. Burial Systems of Ancient Mariana Islanders

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Scattered ruins consisting of two parallel rows of stone columns, usually in pairs of four or five, are found on the Mariana Islands, the northeastern group of the Micronesian archipelago. Each column is made from coral limestone and has a trapezoidal shape. They stand upright and are supposed to be the posts supporting the floor of earlier Chamorros dwelling-houses. The Chamorros called them *latte*.

Within the space marked by the *latte*, and outside of it, we can often find buried human skeletons accompanied by several artifacts. Presumably the ancient Mariana Islanders had the custom of burying corpses under the floor of the dwelling-house or in its frontyard. Sometimes they also buried the dead in caves or put them in large urns.

According to Hans G. Hornbostel who made an archæological survey of the Mariana Islands between 1922 and 1925, and whose manuscripts are in the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, this burial custom contains the following factors:

i. The dead were buried under the floor of the dwelling-house and sometimes in its frontyard. Hornbostel did not recognize these as dwelling places, but thought they were graveyards. The 18 sites excavated by Hornbostel comprise 12 sites with burials both inside and outside.

ii. In each case a large number of the dead were buried side by side. Hornbostel found 31 skeletons at the site of Fenna, on Guam, with 12 inside and 19 outside of the *latte*. At Epau I, on Guam also, were found 27 skeletons, with 20 inside and 7 outside. Another fourteen sites contained more than 2 skeletons each. Numerous skeletons in a *latte* were generally buried parallel, side by side.

iii. The majority of corpses were laid in dorsal extended position, with faces almost always turned to the left side, but rarely to the right side.

iv. Feet of corpses were facing the beach or river shore, but the corpses laid parallel with the row of columns had their legs at a right angle to the ordinary orientation. Hornbostel explained this orientation as indicative of the direction from which the Chamorros ancestors had come.

v. In the ground under the floor many fire holes were found. Some skeletons were laid in such fire holes. Some skeletons were marked by fire. Most of the skeletons were not laid near the fire holes and bore no marks left by fire. Hornbostel's assumption of a direct relation existing between burials and fire holes is rather doubtful.

vi. It seems that the dead do not have any personal adornments on them, and that funerary offerings were not made for them.

vii. Parts of skeletons, for instance skulls or long bones, etc. are occasionally missing. Sometimes, on the contrary, buried skulls have been discovered either lying singly or in groups. Were skull or limb-bones cut off before the interment?

Were these family burials including wounded warriors, ally and even enemy, or slaves, or human sacrifices? It is probable that parts of the skeletons were lost or moved accidentally or on purpose after the interment.

The above mentioned burial system is known thanks to the excavations at several *latte* on Guam Island by Hornbostel who also examined the Islands Rota, Tinian, and Saipan; so we know that this burial system was practised all over the Mariana Islands. I expect to discuss these details in the near future, and only touch here on the problem of interment under or in front of the dwelling-house.

Professor Robert Heine-Geldern pointed out in 1921 that the custom of burial under or in front of the dwelling-house prevails among the Kabui Naga of Manipur, the Wa tribe of Burma, a few tribes in Celebes and some of the Formosan aborigines. I can add to them some tribes of New Guinea and the mountain tribes of northern Luzon of the Philippines. Thus, the burial system of the ancient Chamorros is reminiscent of some Indonesian burial methods, especially the palæo-Indonesian one of northern Luzon in the Philippines.